



United States
Department of
Agriculture

Forest
Service

Santa Fe National Forest

Espanola Ranger District
P.O. Box 3307, Fairview Station
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Espanola, New Mexico 87533
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File Code: 2230-3

Date: March 10, 2003

Dear Permittee,

This letter constitutes the year 2003 Annual Operating Instruction for the Caja del Rio Allotment. As discussed during our annual validation meeting February 6, 2003 we will reevaluate range conditions on the twin hills pasture within the placitas key area **March 14, 2003** to assess current conditions and evaluate if additional livestock reductions are necessary in light of continuing drought conditions on the allotment. Your continued cooperation regarding voluntary livestock reductions is appreciated. Percent reductions by permittee are identified in the table below. This information is useful both to the permittees and the Forest to ensure reductions are equitable in the event of such an action. The association has demonstrated cooperation among its members in exercising these necessary reductions.

I. GRAZING SCHEDULE

Authorized Use on the Caja del Rio allotment is shown below

PERMITTEE NAME	NUMBER OF CATTLE					SEASON OF USE
	permitted	2002 actual use	2002 % reduction	2003 authorized	2003 % reduction	
Gilbert Borrego	20	13	35	13	35	March 1 – February 28
Alonzo Gallegos	52	39	25	30	42	March 1 – February 28
George Gallegos	52	34	35	30	42	March 1 – February 28
Pat Gallegos	52	23	56	21	60	March 1 – February 28
Victor Gallegos	27	16	41	16	41	March 1 – February 28
Gilbert Gonzales	60	39	35	39	35	March 1 – February 28
Tony Gonzales	42	24	43	24	43	March 1 – February 28
Eliso Lujan	16	4	75	4	75	March 1 – February 28
George Ortiz	16	5	68	5	68	March 1 – February 28
Jose Ortiz	46	39	15	39	15	March 1 – February 28
Jose Salazar	10	6	40	6	40	March 1 – February 28
David Sandoval	20	0	100	0	100	March 1 – February 28
Genaro Viscarra	79	0	100	0	100	March 1 – February 28
Caja del Rio La Majada Livestock Association	28	11	61	11	61	March 1 – February 28
TOTAL	520	253	51	238	54	



Pasture schedule for the Caja del Rio Allotment is shown below.

PASTURE	DATE
Twin Hills	February 1 – March 30
Rito	April 1 – June 1
Tetilla	June 2 – August 31
Sagebrush	September 1 – November 31
Twin Hills	December 1 – January 30 (2004)

Current drought conditions may require that cattle be moved through the units quicker or removed from the allotment earlier than expected. This decision will be made in cooperation with you and based on the utilization for key species and agreed upon key areas as outlined in this Annual Operating Instruction.

The District Ranger in coordination with grazing permittees may change the routing plan described above when unforeseen circumstances such as lack of water in pasture or over use within the pasture. The grazing association or the permittees can propose changes of pastures outside of the above routing plan in coordination with this office. The grazing association or permittees, should submit a written justification to this office or coordinate with Donald Serrano of my Staff if a routing plan needs to be changed. The decision made by the District Ranger will be based upon the condition of the range, recommendations of the range staff, and the needs of the permittees.

II. COUNTING AND TAGGING

New tagging is not scheduled for this year. As identified in your grazing permit the calf counter policy is “Any animal 6 months of age or older as of January 1 is considered a counter. Calves less than 6 months of age as of January 1 become counters on March 1. All weaned animals are counters regardless of age.”

III. EXCESS USE

As stated in Part 3 of your term grazing permit, “Livestock grazed in excess of the numbers, outside of the period use, or of a class or kind not authorized in the current Bill for Collection. When the annual application is approved, in whole or in part, livestock grazed in excess of authorized numbers must be removed from lands of the National Forest System. Grazing use by livestock in excess of that authorized in the current Bill for Collection is cause for cancellation and/or suspension of the permit in whole or part and must be assessed at the "unauthorized use rate”.

IV. UTILIZATION/MONITORING

The proper utilization of forage is a critical factor in livestock management on the Caja del Rio allotment. We will be visiting the allotment to insure that utilization levels are within recommended levels. As always grazing association directors and permittees are encouraged to participate while these evaluations are being made. Methods for monitoring utilization are adopted from Holecheck and DeGalt (2000).

This method was briefly presented at the annual validation meeting. The following describes utilization levels, we agreed to for the 2003-grazing season.

Table 3. Qualitative characteristics of grazing intensity categories used to characterize New Mexico rangelands (Holechek & Galt, 6/00, Rangelands).		
Qualitative Grazing Intensity Category	Use of Forage by Weight	Qualitative Indicators of Grazing Intensity
Light to non-use	0-30	Only choice plants (key species) and areas show use. There is no use of poor forage plants
Conservative	31-40	Choice forage plants (key species) have abundant seed stalks; Areas more than a mile from water show little use; About one third to one half primary forage plants show grazing on key areas.
Moderate	41-50	Most of accessible range show use; Key areas show patchy appearance with one half to two thirds of primary forage plants (key species) showing use; Grazing is noticeable 1-1½ miles from water
Heavy	51-60	Nearly all primary forage plants show grazing on key areas: Palatable shrubs show hedging: Key areas show a lack of seed stalks: Grazing is noticeable in areas over 1½ miles from water
Severe	61+	Key areas show a clipped or mowed appearance (no stubble ht.): Shrubs are severely hedged; There is evidence of livestock trailing to forage; Areas over 1½ miles from water lack stubble height.

This method will give us an accurate reading on the utilization levels on key grass species. Use levels generally correlate to a 40 % use level.

Within the Caja del Rio allotment the key forage species will be:

<u>PASTURES</u>	<u>KEY AREA</u>	<u>KEY SPECIES</u>	<u>STUBBLE HEIGHT</u>
Twin Hills	Placitas	Blue Grama	1.5" – 2.0"
		Galleta	2.6"
Rito	Rito	Blue Grama	1.5" – 2.0"
Tetilla	Tetilla	Blue Grama	1.5" – 2.0"
		Galleta	2.6"
Sagebrush	Sagebrush	Blue Grama	1.5" – 2.0"
		Galleta	2.6"

Both the Forest Service and the permittee are responsible for monitoring use and stubble height on the allotment to ensure that proper use levels are **not exceeded**. If areas within a pasture or the pasture as a whole begin to approach the identified stubble heights, actions will need to be taken to limit additional forage use. We are especially concerned with use levels in riparian areas and canyon bottoms where cattle tend to concentrate use on palatable feed.

On January 4th, 2003 Donald Serrano along with Alonzo Gallegos, Pat Gallegos and George Gallegos conducted Production studies in the Twin Hills pasture in the Placitas key area. Results of this transect, indicated adequate forage (400lbs/acre) within this pasture prior to February 1st, 2003 entry in this pasture. **As discussed earlier the Twin Hills pasture and Rito pasture will be monitored on March 14, 2003 in coordination with the Caja del Rio permittees.** Forage use patterns, cattle numbers, salting practices, and coordination of improvements should be monitored periodically to determine when livestock should be moved between pastures. If use within that key area is approaching allowable stubble heights then the remaining key areas will also be monitored and the pasture inspected to determine overall use patterns. This information will be used to determine if cattle need to be re-distributed within the pasture or removed from the pasture.

V. IMPROVEMENT WORK

1. Construct one additional mile to the existing twenty one mile Caja del Rio Pipeline in the Tetilla Pasture, NMED grant
2. Investigate cost share funding from BLM for pipeline laterals to BLM administered lands.
2. Conduct an additional 90 acres of mechanical treatment of pinion/juniper within the Twin Hills pasture, NMED grant.
3. Reconstruct the Headquarters well corral. Permittee labor, RC&D funding

As we discussed during our validation meeting, unauthorized littering and damage to roads during wet periods are continuing issues in the Caja del Rio Allotment. Permittees suggested closing the Caja and allowing only permitted uses, as was done in the past when the Soil Conservation administered the area. In addition permittees were still concerned about fences which have been cut and gates which are continually left open. Currently a closure order is in effect for the Caja del Rio area which allows temporary closures for resource protection and fire restrictions.

VI. SPECIAL MITIGATION MEASURES

In order to conform with Amendment of Forest Plans and the final U. S. Fish and Wildlife Service "Biological Opinion for Ongoing Livestock Grazing Activities on Allotments" which determine a No Affect and/or May Affect Not Likely to Adversely Affect on your allotment, **the following conditions must be met.**

Forage Utilization

Forage use by grazing animals will be maintained at or above a condition, which assures recovery and continued existence of threatened and endangered species. In order to attain this standard, the above site-specific key areas and key forage utilization standards have been developed for the Caja del Rio Allotment.

Mineral Supplements/Salt Blocks

Mineral supplement/Salt block sites will be regularly rotated to reduce trampling and grazing impacts to vegetation. Cutting salt blocks in half before distributing them on the range is an easy way to avoid having to move them, as they get used before they need to be moved.

VII. ADMINISTRATIVE APPEAL

District Ranger decisions regarding issuance, denial, or administration of grazing and livestock use permits may be appealed in accordance with 36 CFR 251, Subpart C. The following standard paragraph is included in this Annual Operating Plan for the purpose of ensuring that you are aware of your appeal rights.

This Annual Operating Instruction (AOI) is hereby made a part of your term grazing permit.

This decision is subject to administrative review pursuant to 36 CFR 251, Subpart C and any appeal of this decision must be fully consistent with 36 CFR 251.90 (see attached). In accordance with 36 CFR 251.84, if you file an appeal, I am willing to meet with you to discuss any concerns you may have with my decision. If you file an appeal, you may request an oral presentation in the appeal or at any time prior to closing of the appeal record (36 CFR 251.97).

Additionally, if you file an appeal, you may request a stay of my decision in the appeal or at any time prior to closing of the appeal record (36 CFR 251.91).

A notice of appeal, including the reasons for appeal, must be filed with Leonard Atencio, Forest Supervisor, Santa Fe National Forest, P.O. Box 1689, Santa Fe, New Mexico 87504-1689 within 45 days of the date of this decision. A copy of the notice of appeal must be filed simultaneously with myself John Miera, Espanola District Ranger, at, P.O. Box 3307, Fairview Station, 1710 N. Riverside Dr., Espanola, New Mexico 87533.

I appreciate you contacting me to resolve disagreements before you file any Notice to Appeal. This will insure that we both understand the reasons for each other's position regarding any issues. If you have any further questions concerning this matter please contact Donald Serrano of my Staff at the above phone or address.

Sincerely,

/s/ John P. Miera
JOHN P. MIERA
Espanola District Ranger